

# Executive Summary

## Overview

*The Rockville's Pike Plan* establishes and communicates a vision for how Rockville's portion of the Rockville Pike corridor can be transformed from a non-distinctive suburban retail strip into an attractive and vibrant location for shopping, living, and working. The plan is an update to the Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan, which was adopted into the City's Master Plan in 1989.

An adopted updated plan provides direction, policies and strategies so that the City can coordinate and collaborate with public and private organizations to achieve the vision. This plan brings forward many of the concepts presented in the 1989 plan, but it also better addresses today's increasingly complex transportation and land use issues. These issues are discussed briefly below and expounded more fully in later chapters.

Regional projections show that almost 9,000 new residents and 4,500 new jobs are expected in the Plan Area by 2040. These changes will account for about 40% of Rockville's population growth during that timeframe, and approximately 11% of the employment growth. These projections signal the need for a vision and a comprehensive plan for the corridor.

The plan's focus is the creation of a vibrant and comfortable mixed-use environment, supported by strong public amenities and facilities, and complemented by a transportation network that will better support pedestrians, drivers, transit riders and bicyclists. It takes advantage of Rockville's position in the broader metropolitan region, but retains a distinctive identity for Rockville. Implementation of the plan should broaden the Pike's appeal from an auto-oriented retail strip to a corridor that offers broader transportation choices and an improved land use framework, and enables the area to remain competitive in a changing retail industry.

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The plan is the product of an intensive community planning initiative that has incorporated input from citizens, private and public sector leaders, government agencies, consultants, City staff, and other stakeholders. Extensive outreach and publicity efforts have been made throughout the planning process to maximize public knowledge about, and participation in, development of the plan.

The Planning Commission process began in January 2011. The Commission held public hearings on a consultants' draft plan in March 2011 and accepted written testimony from January through September 2011. The Commission spent more than a year in work sessions, revising the consultants' plan based on written and oral testimony. After the Commission released its first revised draft in March 2013, a second round of public hearings was held and additional written testimony was received, followed by more work sessions. The final Planning Commission draft was approved on [date] for transmittal to the Mayor and Council for its review and final adoption.

## **The Plan Area**

The Plan Area contains approximately 382 acres, on both sides of and including a 1.98-mile portion of Rockville Pike (Maryland State Route 355). It is bounded on the north by Richard Montgomery Drive and on the south by the City's corporate limits, near Bou Avenue. Boundaries on the western side include Wootton Parkway, the Woodmont Country Club and East Jefferson Street. The eastern boundary is the Metrorail right-of-way.

## **Existing Issues and Challenges**

*Rockville's Pike* addresses key issues and challenges identified by both the public and technical analysis during the planning process.

### *Transportation and Access*

Rockville Pike serves both as a regional "highway" and a local road serving local businesses and residents. This dual function creates multiple conflicts, especially in the outer (right) lanes. The Pike is highly congested at times, with some intersections already exceeding City standards for certain periods of the week. Traffic volume will likely increase as growth continues along the MD 355 corridor and as the area south of Rockville redevelops at high densities.

Pedestrian and bicycle conditions are poor, and often feel unsafe. Sidewalks are narrow, located uncomfortably close to fast-moving traffic, and frequently separated from businesses by expansive parking lots. There are limited opportunities to safely cross the Pike due to long distances between signalized intersections and inadequate pedestrian signal timing. Strip shopping centers are designed for cars and are not pedestrian-friendly. Bicycle infrastructure is inadequate and there is no protected bicycle route along or near the Pike. Furthermore, the rail line and the highway itself limit travel options, especially east-west connectivity. Though Metro's Red Line runs parallel to and near Rockville Pike (there is one stop in the planning

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area and another just to the north), pedestrian and bicycle access to both stops is **difficult**, due to poor sidewalks **and** challenging road crossings.

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### Land Use

The predominant land use pattern in the Pike corridor is in the form of individual parcels with single-story buildings occupied by a single use, set far back from the street and surrounded by surface parking lots. This pattern uses a vast amount of land, forces multiple vehicle trips between properties, and contributes to the large total number of car trips.

The Pike remains an important retail destination located in a strong regional economic market with significant long-term growth potential. Enhancing the appearance and function of the Pike corridor is important, especially since new competition will be emerging from large-scale growth and development nearby, such as in the White Flint area.

There are no parks or public open spaces for recreation, social gathering, or outdoor enjoyment.

Traffic congestion and school capacity, as regulated by the City's **adequate** **public** facilities standards, **may** inhibit **certain types of** redevelopment **for portions** of the Pike corridor **unless** necessary infrastructure is **both funded and** **provided**, **or other accommodation is found in those instances**.

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## Corridor Planning Principles

The *Rockville's Pike* public process led to the identification of a set of corridor planning principles that have guided the formulation of this plan. They are:

- A. Livable, desirable environment enhanced by thoughtful urban design
  1. Community design and development appropriate to Rockville
  2. Mixed uses **and new neighborhoods**
  3. Inviting conditions for walking and biking
  4. Appealing parks and public open spaces for community gathering and activity
  5. Environmentally friendly and sustainable
  6. **A** distinctive character for Rockville's portion of the corridor
  7. Development that is supported by commensurate growth of infrastructure
- B. Multimodal transportation
  1. Smooth and safe vehicular flow
  2. Safe and accessible pedestrian and biking infrastructure
  3. Access and movement choices for all travel modes that provide connections within the corridor and with surrounding areas
  4. Efficient and reliable local and regional public transportation options
  5. Easy-to-navigate environment
- C. Economic viability

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1. Retention and attraction of local and national retail
2. City support for successful development
3. Financeable infrastructure and fiscally responsible implementation

## Plan Policies for Transportation and Land Use

### Transportation Policies

The Transportation Policies seek to support both the Transportation and Land Use visions of the plan to make the corridor more sustainable and **more accessible for multiple modes of travel**.

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#### **1. Redesign and Reconstruct Rockville Pike as a Multi-Way Boulevard.**

The core recommendation of this plan is to redesign and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a multi-way boulevard. **A multi-way boulevard attempts to balance the competing needs of roadway capacity, local access, transit, street parking, bicycle accommodation, and pedestrian comfort. It consists of through lanes for faster-moving traffic and transit; access lanes for slow-moving local traffic, bicycles and on-street parking; wide sidewalks and green medians.** The boulevard concept is crucial to meeting the transportation, place-making, and economic goals of the plan and addresses the dual - local and regional- nature of the Pike.

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The boulevard design will:

- Separate local and regional trips.
- Create the conditions for a shift in the transportation modal split along the Pike, from a high degree of reliance on the private automobile to more diverse transportation choices.
- Make the Pike safer for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.
- Integrate the Twinbrook Metro Station into the corridor and make public transit a more attractive option.
- Allow for the possibility of additional high-capacity transit service along the Pike.
- Bring transit, walking, and bicycle users closer to the land uses of the Pike, protected from the fast-moving traffic on the main lanes.
- Reinforce the role of the corridor as a significant retail center in the region.
- Facilitate the transformation of the corridor into an attractive place by creating a streetscape plan and moving utilities underground.

**2. Expand the street network** to increase connectivity and movement choice, diffuse traffic congestion, create more frequent and convenient crossing opportunities for pedestrians, and create smaller, more pedestrian-friendly blocks.

**3. Create “Complete Streets”**, that accommodate **automobiles, pedestrians, transit users and bicyclists**,

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**4. Optimize access to and use of public transit**, including Metrorail, local buses, and, potentially, a new rapid transit service along Rockville Pike.

## Land Use Policies

*Rockville's Pike* integrates the transportation policies with a set of land use policies to guide the transformation of the corridor from a nondescript automobile-dominated strip to an attractive, walkable place. The proposed land use policies will:

- 1. Seek to ensure a comfortable and functional relationship between the public infrastructure and private development.** The plan, and the associated development regulations, addresses the relationship between building facades and public infrastructure, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, the public spaces formed by the disposition of buildings, and the scale and types of streets and blocks.
- 2. Bring buildings and land uses up to the sidewalks.** In most locations, buildings will be constructed adjacent to continuous sidewalks to frame the public realm, structure the environment for pedestrians, and position pedestrians where land uses are located. The distance between building faces across the Pike will be reduced from that which was endorsed in the 1989 Pike plan by 18 to 28 feet.
- 3. Regulate building height by location within the Plan Area.** Maximum building heights serve walkability and economic development objectives by permitting sufficient mixed use density to create vitality, while responding to community concerns about over-development and maintaining a human scale environment. Different height standards are appropriate for different parts of the Plan Area and depend on the specific characteristics of their locations.
- 4. Create smaller blocks that are walkable.** Reducing the size of existing blocks as part of the redevelopment process creates a more finely-developed street network, increases connectivity and movement choices for all travel modes, and provides increased street frontage for land uses.
- 5. Provide continuous, wide, pleasant sidewalks.** Sidewalks are located immediately next to land uses to encourage inter-site movement (except, perhaps, in the middle and northern parts of the east side of the Pike where sites are very narrow and the full boulevard concept will be difficult to achieve). Sidewalks are wide and feature amenities such as street trees, benches, bike racks, and places for outdoor restaurant seating.
- 6. Provide special enhancements for pedestrians at strategic intersections and on strategically located streets.** This plan places emphasis on the treatment of building frontages at strategic intersections to create enlarged pedestrian environments with art, fountains and other place-making features.
- 7. Allow for and support a mix of uses** to encourage activity in the daytime and evening, reduce dependency on automobiles, and create a full-service transit-oriented neighborhood around the Twinbrook Metro station.
- 8. Encourage architecture that has visual interest and allow for creativity.** The plan does not mandate particular architectural styles, but rather encourages massing and building forms

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that are visually interesting, contribute to energy on the street, and incorporate human scale detailing.

**9. Provide parks.** There are no parks in the Plan Area now. The need exists and this need will grow as the number of people living and working in the Plan Area increases.

**10. Require the creation of public use space through redevelopment.** Growth and redevelopment can and should result in better infrastructure for existing and new residents. By-products of development are new roads, parks and open space. These facilities are difficult to achieve without redevelopment unless the City chooses to absorb all of the costs.

**11. Strategically locate and right-size parking.** This plan locates most parking in structures behind or under buildings, thereby minimizing inactive zones and reducing the visually unappealing effect of large surface lots in front of buildings. The plan also encourages less parking **over time**, as the area becomes more pedestrian-friendly.

## The Importance of Implementing the Plan

This plan incorporates numerous concepts that were part of the 1989 Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan. These concepts include creating service roads parallel to the Pike, expanding the street network, establishing a build-to line along Rockville Pike, encouraging a mix of uses, and making the Pike more attractive. Nonetheless, there are many reasons why an update to the 1989 plan is needed:

- Problems identified in the 1989 plan remain – mobility, safety, appearance function and the experience of being on the Pike continue to be inadequate.
- Development interest is ripening near the Twinbrook Metro Station. This plan focuses on improving walkability and access to transit.
- The current roadway system is close to saturation at peak periods. Traffic congestion will continue to get worse, given the development that is planned for north and south of Rockville, whether or not any new development occurs within Rockville. There is a need for a more efficient Pike design, expanded road network, improved transit, and much better conditions for walking and biking to provide people with options for getting around.
- Rockville needs to define its place in the context of competition that is coming from beyond its borders. The Pike corridor is important to the City's fiscal health and is economically significant to Rockville and the region. Overall, the Pike is prosperous today, but Rockville must consider how it can continue to successfully compete over the next 20 to 30 years.
- Developing a new plan for the corridor is an essential component of the process to manage change within the City, address pressures from development north and south of

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Rockville, manage the impacts of external development on Rockville's infrastructure, and create a unique identity, distinguishable from other corridors.

- Much of the built environment along the Pike is aging, bland, and designed primarily to accommodate cars. Increased congestion can be slowed by making the corridor a pleasant place to walk and an appealing destination rather than just a series of shopping centers that can only be accessed by car, creating a drive-in/drive-out environment.
- Montgomery County's proposal for a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system that would likely include a route along MD 355 has a potentially enormous impact on this area, as do the adopted White Flint Sector Plan (2010) and the upcoming White Flint II Plan for the area to Rockville's immediate south. Given these significant impacts, which were not part of the reality of the Pike when the 1989 plan was adopted, Rockville needs an updated adopted vision for its portion of the corridor.

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There is a need for a clear vision for the corridor for the coming decades. The alternative is no vision for a better functioning, more attractive, vibrant corridor; no opportunity to create parks; and more traffic congestion produced by development outside of Rockville that is beyond Rockville's control.

Implementing this plan will require strong cooperation among the City, Montgomery County, the State of Maryland, the private sector, and other organizations. It will also require a careful evaluation of appropriate funding mechanisms and options, with the understanding that Rockville must work proactively and collaboratively with other entities to fund and build infrastructure. The City will need to revise development regulations that present impediments to full implementation of the plan vision and advocate for components of the plan that are outside of its control.

## Implementation Steps

The action steps are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of the plan document, and are summarized below:

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### General Policy Elements

1. Maintain strong regional partnerships
2. Ensure adequate infrastructure and community facilities
3. Advocate for components of the plan that are outside of Rockville's direct control
4. Focus on place-making near the Twinbrook Metro Station early in the life of the plan
5. Develop cost estimates and funding strategies

### Implement the Transportation Policies

1. Re-design and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a multi-way boulevard
2. Expand the street network
3. Optimize access to and use of transit
4. Expand Transportation Demand Management (TDM) activities in the corridor

5. Strive to refine methodologies for measuring transportation mode share and addressing congestion management

#### **Implement the Land Use Policies**

1. Adopt the Rockville Pike District Code
2. Revise development regulations and standards
3. Make the Pike an inviting, walkable place
4. Acquire parkland

These action steps bring to light the complexity of implementing the plan for the corridor. Implementing this plan in full will require a high level of collaboration between the City, other jurisdictions, and the private sector over decades. Certain components will also require appropriate funding mechanisms and commitments. Finally, implementation will require seizing opportunities, overcoming obstacles, and thoughtful timing.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Rockville Pike corridor can be more than a shopping location. It can be a great boulevard that serves both local and regional needs and wants, and can enhance its already central role in the economy of Rockville and Montgomery County. This plan seeks to achieve this vision.